

NOVEL



乃木若葉は 勇者である

企画原案・シリーズ構成:タカヒロ(みなとそふと)

執筆:朱白あおい イラスト:BUNBUN 監修:Project 2H

アウトロー・
ワンドーランド

原案:田中ロミオ
キャラクター原案・脚本:saitem
著:波羅

SILENTWORLD

著:ごめ

イラスト:空中幼彩

脚本:波羅

監修:Project 2H

キャラクター原案・脚本:QP:flapper

脚本:波羅

監修:波羅

ガーリッシュ ナンバー

著:波羅

キャラクター原案・脚本:QP:flapper

脚本:波羅

MAISHA RECORD DEPARTMENT • MAISHA-SAMA

CENSORED

It's my fault.

I hurt those who fight alongside with me.

While I keep on fighting and winning, did I end up ?

I have been convinced that I was fine the way I am now...

...Hinata has said.

That in the first place, the reason the world had fallen into this state

Was because of mankind's .

That's what Shinju-sama has been telling her.

Does that mean I'm also one of them...?

Hero Record Jan 2019 AD

Nogi Wakaba's Record

第七話

新芽

vol.7

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監修/Project 2H

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Chapter 7: New Bud

When she opened her eyes, her vision was covered by a white ceiling.

For a moment, Wakaba didn't know where she was.

After surveying her surroundings, "Ahh, this is the hospital" she recalled.

- "Are you awake, Wakaba-chan?"

Hinata was sitting next to the bed Wakaba was lying on.

After the Vertices' largest ever invasion, the Heroes were hospitalized for treatment and physical examination.

Including Wakaba, everyone was injured because of the fight. In addition, they also need to investigate the impact of using Hero's power for a long period of time.

Although Wakaba had some external wounds on her body, it seemed like none of them was severe enough to linger around for long. However, because of inflammation in joints and muscles in various places, as well as stress fracture in some parts, she was told to refrain from exercising. Even though she didn't have any big wounds on the outside, the same could not be said for the inside of her body.

A body of a middle school student is not as completed as an adult's. Even if it is strengthened by Shinju's power, overworking one's body has never be a good thing.

Wakaba got up from the bed.

- "Do you want to eat something?"

Among the fruits they received as "Gift for the Heroes" from the townspeople, Hinata took out an apple and started peeling its skin with a knife. After cutting the apple into comb-shaped pieces, she used a toothpick to pick one up and presented it to Wakaba.

After being fed two, three pieces of apple, Wakaba got off the bed.

- "I have to go check up on Yuuna"

- "... That's right"

After a short moment of hesitation, Hinata nodded.

As Wakaba tried to walk with her unsteady feet, Hinata propped up her shoulder.

With each step forward, the inside of Wakaba's body screamed with pain.

Having borrowed Hinata's shoulder, Wakaba finally arrived in front of the ICU.



Anzu and Tamako were also there. Tamako was sitting on the couch in the hallway, hanging her head. Next to her, Anzu was glancing around, not knowing what to do.

- "Ah, Wakaba-san"

Noticing Wakaba's arrival, Anzu spoke up.

- "How is Yuuna... doing?"

In answer to Wakaba's sad question, Anzu looked down and shook her head.

- "...Her consciousness still hasn't returned"

- "I see..."

Beyond the glass window, Yuuna was lying on the bed inside the treatment room. It was painful to look at her covered in bandages and tubes.

- "It'll be fine... After all, this hospital has the best equipments and doctors. And according to the examination, her life isn't in danger"

That said, Hinata's voice still sounded somewhat sad.

Right now, even the usually noisy Tamako was unable to say anything.

None of the 4 people remaining in front of the treatment room knew what they should say, they all were at lost for words.

Silence prevailed for who knew how long.

Pushing her IV stand, Chikage showed up.

Keeping her mouth shut, Chikage went past Wakaba's side, and looked at Yuuna beyond the glass window. And then, she bit down on her lip in frustration.

- "Why did... this happen...?"

Like she was lamenting her own powerlessness.

Like she was cursing this world.

Chikage muttered.

And then she turned her gaze at Wakaba. Whether it was because of crying or because of lack of sleep, Chikage's eyes were red.

- "This is... the outcome of your action..."

Wakaba took Chikage's blame in silence. Wakaba was aware that she was the one responsible for Yuuna's injuries.



- "Why did things turn out like this... do you know?"

- "I know. It was all because I stuck out and lacked any kind of plan..."

The independent action that could be said as going berserk. It was what brought about this outcome.

- "Wrong...!"

Chikage squeezed out a cry.

- "As I thought, you don't understand anything...! The number 1 problem is your reason for fighting...!"

- "My reason, for fighting...?"

Wakaba didn't understand the meanings of her words.

- "You always only fight to revenge against the Vertices...! That's why... You lose yourself in rage...! And don't even realize when you're the one exposing the people around you to danger!!"

- "..."

Chikage's words resounded in the hallway.

Even though Tamako could also hear her voice, she kept hanging her head, saying nothing. Not even she could defense Wakaba right now.

- "You... are not qualified to be our leader...! Because of your fighting, Yuuna-san was hurt... From now on too, the same thing will definitely happen again! In that case... I-"

- "You're going too far!"

Anzu was the one stopping Chikage.

- "Up to now, Wakaba-san has always been the one fighting in the frontline. Even if that way of fighting was overbearing... It's wrong to deny everything she has done"

- "...!"

Chikage walked to Anzu's side and raised her hand.

But before she could swing that hand down, Tamako caught it, stopping her.

- "Stop that... If you make a move on Anzu, I won't stay quite anymore"

As if the atmosphere had frozen, quietness returned to the hallway.

Admits the silence, Hinata turned her eyes to the direction of Yuunna and muttered.

- "I wonder when everyone is fighting like this... who is the one hurting the most...?"



After that, no one said anything, everyone returned to their own hospital room. Chikage was the only one remaining in front of the ICU.

-“Nogi-san, unless you change your way... I can't fight together with you anymore...”

While fixing her gaze at Yuuna, Chikage told Wakaba.

It was past bedtime already but Wakaba still couldn't fall asleep, she had been staring at the room's ceiling for a long time.

What Chikage told her at noon kept flashing through her mind, again and again.

(Fighting only for revenge, huh...)

Giving the enemies their return --- That was the principle of Wakaba's action. Returning the rage and sadness of those who had been killed and tormented to the Vertices. She had filled up herself with that one mindset and stood in the battlefield.

Now that it had been denied... just how should she fight from now on?

She didn't know.

The Wakaba right now was like a child who can't even stand steady on her feet. She had lost sight of her position, knowing not where she should head to, and was simply standing still in one place.

The next day, as all the treatments and examinations had been finished, and Wakaba and the others were discharged.

They still couldn't continue training as heroes yet but there wouldn't be any difficulties with their daily life.

However, even now, Yuuna still hadn't regained her consciousness. As for Wakaba, she still couldn't find out the answer to the doubt in her heart.

Tamako, Anzu, and Chikage were also discharged and had returned to the school, but their situation was different from before. Everyone remained quite even during breaks and lunch time.

By nature, it was Wakaba's job as the leader to change this atmosphere. However, she wasn't skilful enough to do it.

That night, Wakaba visited Hinata's room.

She was carrying a pillow in her arms, trying to take a hold of her anxiety.

When she opened the door, Hinata was busying packing her clothes, notes and other things.

-“What're you doing, Hinata?”

-“Ahh, Wakaba-chan, welcome in. I'm gathering my stuffs right now”



- "...? Why are you doing that?"

After finishing packing her stuffs, Hinata closed the zipper on bag and answered.

- "Tomorrow, I'll leave this dorm"

- "Eh!? D-did something happen!?"

Wakaba trembled, grasping her pillow tightly. Why would Hinata leave the dorm? Was it because her role as the [Attending Miko for Heroes] had changed? No, in the first place, a Miko's duty was never to attend on a Hero, so wasn't it more strange that Hinata had been staying in this dorm up to now? In that case, Hinata was just returning to her original role as a Miko---

As those thoughts were winding around in Wakaba's head, Hinata reassured her with a chuckle.

- "Wakaba-chan, stop shaking so much. I'm not leaving this dorm forever. It's only for a short period of time. I was called to Taisha's HQ"

Wakaba left out a relief sigh.

- "I, I see... But still, why so suddenly?"

It was really rare for them for them to be called up by Taisha. Since Taisha's staffs came in and out of Wakaba's school all the time, if there were any businesses, you could just tell them and vice versa.

Hinata's expression clouded up a little.

- "They didn't tell me the reason. That said, since the New Year started, a lot of things have happened... The scale of the last Vertices attack was incomparable to the ones before, a person was severely wounded..."

It had been several months since the Vertices' invasion on Shikoku started --- Right now, something might be trying to make a big move. Be it on the Vertices side, or on the human side...

- "By the way, Wakaba-chan, what kind of business do you have? It's midnight already"

- "Ah, uh, about that..."

Wakaba mumbled, finding it hard to start talking.

Seeing her childhood friend like that, Hinata sat down on the bed and patted her own laps.

While receiving Hinata's lap pillow, Wakaba started talking bit by bit.

The things Chikage told her.

The fact that she didn't know how she should fight from now on.

The doubt that she had been wrong this whole time ---





While she was talking, Wakaba was brought to tears. Since she was a child, Wakaba had never let other people see her tears. However, Hinata was an exception. Only in front of her that Wakaba laid bare both her heart and body.

-“What should I do...?”

-“...”

Hinata couldn't answer Wakaba's question.

Whenever she was at lost, Wakaba had always come to Hinata for help. And Hinata had always answered her.

Against Wakaba who was bearing a heavy duty of a hero protecting the world---

As well as against the best friend whom she had spent time with ever since childhood, she wanted to do everything she could for her. Wakaba, who honestly relied on her and only her, was just so lovely.

However, was telling Wakaba the answer right here and now a right choice?

The main point of Wakaba's problem, as well as its solution, Hinata could put them into words for her. And then, the quick to learn Wakaba would immediately be able to improve the situation.

--Was that method really the right one?

Even if the problem was solved on the surface, nothing within Wakaba would change. No one aside from Hinata would notice, Wakaba's mental fragility would never disappear. And at that rate, Wakaba's life would possibly be put in danger.

-“...”

Wakaba waited for Hinata's words.

However, Hinata didn't give Wakaba the answer.

-“Wakaba-chan, you have to find the answer and overcome this problem yourself”

-“Eh...?”

Wakaba doubted her ears. Hinata's words--- even her gentle voice was thrusting her away.

Hinata wiped her childhood friend's tears with a handkerchief.

-“Now, please stop crying. Or I will snatch a pic of your crying face”

Taking out her smart phone, she pointed it towards Wakaba.

-“...Just take it if you like”

Wakaba pouted.



Hinata pushed the shutter button of her phone's camera.

- "You really took one..."

Wakaba glared at Hinata.

- "Well, from tomorrow, although it's just for a short time, I won't be able to meet you anymore, Wakaba-chan. So I need to replenish my share of Wakaba-chan"

Hinata looked at the picture of Wakaba she just took.

By the time I return from Taisha, this crying face will have turned to a positive one---

She wished.

- "Wakaba-chan, you definitely are able to overcome this problem yourself... I believe that you can"

Next day's early morning, in the faint light while the sun still hadn't risen, Hinata left the dorm, taken away by a Taisha's messenger. Because she didn't tell anyone about her departure time, no one was seeing her off.

On the way, she kept looking back at Marugame castle many times. She felt uneasy about leaving Wakaba, and the Heroes who were in gloomy mood.

However, as a miko under controlled of Taisha, Hinata didn't have the right to refuse their call. With painful reluctance, Hinata left the dorm behind.

Anzu, who woke up early by chance, was looking down at Hinata from the dorm's window.

- "Hinata-san..."

It was far, but she could still saw Hinata's face. If she thought about the current state of all the Heroes including Wakaba, Anzu could easily guess what Hinata was uneasy about.

That day, even when school had started, Wakaba was still down in a pit. Be it during classes or breaks, she didn't move even 1 step away from her seat, and kept hanging her head unmoving.

Furthermore, every now and then, she would let out a really deep sigh.

- "Haaahh~..."

Although it had been established that everyone would go to the cafeteria for lunch together, no matter how many time Tamako called out to Wakaba, there was no answer.

- "Are you a corpse?!"

Even when Tamako made a retort like that, Wakaba still didn't notice anything and just ignored her.

Tamako shrugged her shoulder and said to Anzu.



- "No good. Her soul has completely left"

- "...It can't be helped. Considering what happened with Yuuna-san and now, even Hinata-san is not here..."

- "But still, if we just leave her like that, you know..."

It seemed like even the easy-going Tamako could not leave Wakaba alone right now.

In the end, until after school, Wakaba didn't talk to anyone and just kept hanging her head the whole time.

(I guess even Hinata is fed up with me, huh...)

This morning, when Wakaba woke up, Hinata was no longer in the dorm anymore. It looked like she was already on her way to Taisha's HQ. She couldn't even see her off. She wondered why Hinata didn't tell her about her departure time. If it was the normal her up until now, she would at least tell only Wakaba about the time. Coupled that with what happened yesterday's night, Wakaba felt like she was rejected by Hinata.

- "Guess it can't be helped, huh... Even though I'm the heroes' leader, instead of protecting the other heroes, I went and put them in danger. Well then, parading around the city, whipping, crucifixion, imprisonment... Whatever kind of punishments, let's just accept them all. Ufufu..."

When Wakaba was thinking about such thing, Anzu stood in front of her desk.

- "Wakaba-san"

- "...What?"

Wakaba raised her head and looked at Anzu with an ambitionless expression.

- "Let's go outside for a bit!"

Dragged by Anzu, Wakaba left the school and went to the town.

The region around Marugame castle had been flourishing as a castle town though the ages, even now, many people were living their lives in the town areas. Thereafter the arrival of the Vertices 3 years ago, many people from outside had migrated to Shikoku.

(Suddenly taking me outside, what is she planning...?)

Wakaba walked, not understanding Anzu's intention.

And then Anzu came to a stop in front of a certain house.

- "Three years ago, the college student living in this house was studying in Hiroshima university... On the day Vertices appeared... she was able to escape to Shikoku, but then the Sky fear syndrome started manifesting on her. Both she and her family have been suffering for a long time. But I heard that since the day they heard about the Heroes' victory against the Vertices on the news, bit by bit, her mentality has started stabilizing and her condition has improved"



Wakaba listened to Anzu's words, still not understanding her intention.

Anzu begun walking again, and stopped in front of another house.

- "The family in this house has been living in Marugame city for a long time, they hold a strong attachment for the local. I heard that they said if the Heroes hadn't protected Shikoku, they would have lost their precious hometown"

Then she started walking again, and this time, stopped in front of an apartment building.

- "Most of the people living here are immigrants from Honshu and Kyushu. Many people evacuating to Shikoku from outside had lost their families, their jobs, and their house to the Vertices, they have lost their will to live. There have been lots of people trying to kill themselves. But I heard that after seeing the fighting Heroes, they have been becoming more optimistic"

Everyone living in Shikoku had been experiencing that tragedy from 3 years ago. And whether it was indirectly or directly, thanks to the Heroes protecting Shikoku, they could continue living right now.

- "I sometimes go for a walk around the town. And then I ask the townspeople about their life circumstances, there're also people who come to talk to me when they realize I'm a hero"

- "Is that so...?"

Wakaba almost never went out to the town. Her life was completed inside Marugame castle and the dorm, and since among the Heroes, Wakaba's face was the most well known, she was told to avoid going out as much as she could.

As they walked, Anzu kept stopping from time to time and talked about the townspeople's lives.

On the way, they met a woman pushing a baby cart.

When she looked at Wakaba's face, the woman stopped and looked surprised.

- "Um... Are you perhaps Nogi Wakaba-sama?"

As Wakaba nodded in confusion, the baby cart woman lowered her head and said "Thank you very much". Through her voice, they knew that she had said it from the bottom of her heart.

- "I... three years ago, I was evacuating from Shimane shrine alongside with Nogi-sama"

It looked like Wakaba had traveled with her and her husband when she led the evacuees from Shimane back to Shikoku.

It was thanks to Wakaba that their lives were saved.

And now, after three years, from the two lives Wakaba had saved, a new life was born.

- "This girl's name is [Wakaba]. I named her after Hero-sama... Really, thank you very much. Finally... I could say thanks to you in person"



Wakaba was allowed to hold the baby.

She could feel the warm and weight of a life.

The woman kept thanking her time over and over again while in tears.

After the woman had gone, Anzu told Wakaba.

- "This is what you've been protecting, Wakaba-san"

- "What I've been... protecting"

Dumbfounded, Wakaba repeated Anzu's words.

Something---

It felt like something inside Wakaba's heart was changing.

(I see...)

Wakaba closed her eyelids.

Even now, she could recall vividly the scene of the first day Vertices attacked. It had been burned to her mind.

The people being eaten right in front of her.

The classmates who were deformed completely.

The sight of the monsters wriggling around.

The devastated country.

No matter how much time past, those memories would still lingered in Wakaba's body like a nightmare.

(...All this time, I am trapped in those memories...)

It was a trauma.

The tragic event three years ago had left behind a deep wound within the young Wakaba's heart.

No matter how tough she acted, and even when she was strong enough to eradicate those monsters, that wound would still be there. That wound forced Wakaba to keep pursuing revenge for the death. Losing herself in anger in front of the Vertices, obsessing with revenge, everything was because of the deep, deep wound in her heart.

(But now... I have to get over it)

She must not stay as a prisoner of the past forever. Right now, Wakaba was responsible for the lives of many people.



Instead of the deaths, she had to fight for the livings.

Instead of those who had gone, she had to turn her gaze at the people beside her.

--Instead of somewhere faraway... I think it'd be better if you look at the people around you, at those close to you.

Finally, Wakaba was able to understand the words Hinata said that day.

- "So that's why Hinata was pushing me away..."

You need to realize your own weakness or there'd be no point. Because she thought about Wakaba, Hinata didn't say anything.

Anzu nodded, and smiled.

- "I saw Hinata-san leaving the dorm by chance. Her face looked extremely worried. I believed that she was definitely worried about you, Wakaba-san so I thought that I need to do something"

- "Thanks... Anzu, you're... a good fellow"

- "You're welcome. I'm not very reliable as a hero but I'm your comrade!"

Anzu said, puffing up her chest.

- "...There's no way you're not reliable. Everyone acknowledge the precision of your marksmanship, Anzu, I was also saved multiple times thanks to your covering fire from faraway. Besides, if not because of your quick-thinking, we wouldn't have won against that Vertex the other time"

- "Uh... I feel so embarrassed when you compliment me, Wakaba-san..."

When Wakaba and Anzu were talking while walking alongside each other, Tamako's head suddenly stuck out from between the two of them.

- "Why're you two having fun alone--? Let Tama join in too--"

- "Tamacchi-senpai? Why are you here?"

While Anzu was surprised, Anzu pushed out her lips.

- "Because Anzu and Wakaba left the school with such serious faces, so I was worried and chased after you guys. I was thinking that maybe you two were fighting. And then rather than fighting, it looks like you two're having fun talking with each other!"

- "...Sorry, looked like I made you worry"

- "I-It's not like I want you to apologize or anything!"

Or rather, it made her feels bad being apologized to like that, Tamako turned away.



- "So you were worried about us, Tamako... On top of boosting the team's morale with your full of energy way of fighting, you also cares about your comrades like this. Tamako, you really are an irreplaceable comrade of mine"

- "Hah!? Wha-what're you suddenly saying!? Ta-Tama won't be fooled by those kind psychological tricks!"

As Tamako's face reddened, she assumed a mysterious Kenpo-ish stance facing Wakaba.

- "Nahh, Tamacchi-senpai looks really easy to fool..."

Anzu murmured in a small voice.

- "...Did you say something? Anzu"

- "No no, nothing"

- "No, you definitely did say something! I got the feeling that you just said something really rude!"

While watching the two quarrelling, Wakaba thought.

That beside her, there were reliable and warmhearted comrades.

As long as she had these comrades, she would surely even triumph over her past wound.

- "Tamako, Anzu"

Wakaba bowed down to the two comrades that fight alongside her.

- "As long as you guys are by my side, I won't lose to my own weakness and go rampant anymore.

That's why... will you still fight together with me?"

Tamako and Anzu nodded at Wakaba's words.

- "Certainly, Wakaba-san is our leader after all!"

- "Of course! Just leave it to Tama!"

That night, in Chikage's room, Wakaba and she sat in seiza facing each other.

- "..."

- "..."

Time kept ticking by as the two remained silence.

Eventually---

- "I'm sorry, Chikage"





Wakaba bowed down deeply.

- "I was being arrogant. I was planning to fight by myself. I thought it was enough if I just keep defeating the Vertices alone. Because I was trapped in the past, I didn't look at the people around me, and even lost sight of myself. This is--- the result of my heart's weakness"

- "..."

Chikage listened to Wakaba's words in silence.

Wakaba raised her head, and stared at Chikage's eyes with earnestness.

- "From now on, I won't fight alone and act arrogant anymore. Rather than the deaths, I'll fight thinking about the livings... That's why, from now on too, I want you to fight alongside me"

Chikage stayed quiet for a while--- Finally, she slowly opened her mouth.

- "...No matter what you said, it's meaningless... Words alone... can't prove whether or not... you have really changed..."

- "..."

- "That's why... demonstrate it with your action. I will... watch you from the side"

- "...! So, does that mean---"

Chikage would also keep fighting alongside with Wakaba.

- "I also... might have said a bit too much..."

Chikage said, averting her eyes from Wakaba's in embarrassment.

It was the next day that Yuuna woke up.

Because her conscious had fully returned, and her condition had also stabilized, before long, she was moved to a room in the general ward. There were no injuries that could leave behind after-effect, it looked her recovery was going well.

- "Everyone was so worried and yet I recovered like it was nothing... Sorry for giving such a false alarm!!"

Yuuna said apologetically when Wakaba visited her.

- "The most important thing is that you're properly recovering. Besides... I'm the one who need to apologize. It was my fault that you was hurt this badly, Yuuna"

Yuuna was acting energetically, but there were still bandages left on her body. Even if they said her recovery was going well... Her wound was definitely not a light one.

Wakaba told Yuuna about the things that happened while she was unconscious.

Her fight with Chikage. How she had realized the weakness in her heart. How she came to know about the warmth of her comrades.

And--- the fact that what she needed to value right now was those who were living, those who were beside her.

Yuuna quietly listened to Wakaba's words.

"Together with my mind and body, as a leader, I still am very immature but... I want you to fight alongside with me"

As Wakaba said that and bowed down, Yuuna took her hands and smiled.

"Of course I will, Wakaba-chan, I'm your friend after all. It might be true that you tend to overdo everything by yourself... but I'm certain that it's your action that has always motivated everyone. That's why, from now on, I'll always fight together with you"

"Thanks... I'm glad you said that"

Wakaba lifted up her head. Clearing of doubt, she looked refreshed with a new determination.

"Well, since you're still recovering, I shouldn't stay for too long. It's time for me to go"

However, Yuuna didn't let go of Wakaba's hands, stopping her on her track.

"It's fine, visiting hours still hasn't ended. The two of us don't usually talk like this after all, I want you to stay by my side for a bit longer... Wakaba-chan, somehow it feels like you've become gentler than before. I like the current Wakaba-chan more"

2019 AD

Even when mankind was approaching the time of twilight, the days kept on passing by.

Amidst that time, the girls continue to change and grow up.

And then---

Their trial was just about to begin.

(Chapter 7 – Fin)